

Battery Creek teachers team up on students to boost grades

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Battery Creek High School is the first school in South Carolina to adopt a California-based professional development program designed to help teachers collaborate on lesson plans and pinpoint student weaknesses.

The program, called Pearson Learning Teams, provides training and on-site support to help teachers communicate with their peers who teach the same courses.

Educational publisher Pearson Education will pay for the program, worth \$30,000 to \$60,000, at Battery Creek this school year, with the hope that other schools in the state will adopt the model, said Brad Ermeling, executive director of Learning Teams.

"This is what we call an investment site," he said. "It's a chance for us to help both the district and other districts in the state see the work before they would invest their own resources in it."

Learning Teams started as a nonprofit organization at the University of California Los Angeles in the 1980s and was acquired by Pearson Education in 2005, Ermeling said. More than 300 schools in eight states now use the program.

Ermeling said Pearson had been searching for a South Carolina school to be a pilot for the program, and a former Robert Smalls Middle School teacher who now works for Pearson suggested the Beaufort County School District.

Sean Alford, the district's chief of instructional services, wanted to start the program in a high school, where teachers are more isolated from their co-workers and they specialize in specific subjects, he said.

"If there is a place where we need to shore up our team process, it's in the high schools," he said. "I think Battery Creek is a school that has shown

improvement over past three years ... but they still need to improve."

Ten learning teams of about three teachers each were formed at Battery Creek and began meeting last week. Teachers analyzed student data, including scores on state-mandated tests, and samples of class work to identify areas where students need help.

Lynn Hudnall, an assistant principal at Battery Creek, said the geometry team found students have trouble demonstrating knowledge of angles. At the team's next meeting, the teachers will develop a common lesson plan to improve the way they teach that topic and an assessment to go along with the lesson, she said.

Ermeling said it's not uncommon for teachers to meet and discuss instruction. But the Learning Teams model formalizes those meetings instead of waiting for it to happen by chance in the teacher's lounge.

"It takes what teachers might do a bit more haphazardly or as time allows and helps them very systematically work together," he said.